

The “Nea” Church

The sixth-century Byzantine Emperor Justinian saw himself as a new Solomon, destined to outdo the Hebrew king of that name in building magnificent temples to the Lord. He rebuilt Jerusalem’s church of the Resurrection and, gave us the Great Church of Constantinople, Hagia Sophia.

Justinian also built a vast church complex in Jerusalem on the highest point in the city, the New (*Nea*) Church of the Theotokos. Of unprecedented size itself, it was surrounded by many buildings: accommodations for pilgrims, a hospital and a monastery. The principal historian of that age, Procopius, described it as “a shrine with which no other can be compared.” [Antoninus of Piacenza](#), who visited it in 570, spoke of “its great congregation of monks, and its guest houses for men and women. In catering for travelers they have a vast number of tables, and more than three thousand beds for the sick.”

Archeologists have shown that the Nea was designed to be twice the size of the Jewish temple. Like the temple, the Nea was adorned with cedars of Lebanon. Also like the temple, its entrance was flanked by two elaborately carved red marble columns. As the Theotokos, the new temple, was the *ka-tharotatos naos*, so the Nea would be the ultimate temple built by the new Solomon.

Like the Jewish temple, the Nea would not survive the first millennium, destroyed in wars and earthquakes. The Theotokos, however, remains our heavenly tabernacle in whose womb Christ took flesh.

From the Synaxarion for the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

Our most holy lady dwelt like a dove in the sanctuary, sustained by spiritual food brought by an angel of God, until she was twelve years old. She lived a heavenly life, above that of our first parents in Paradise.

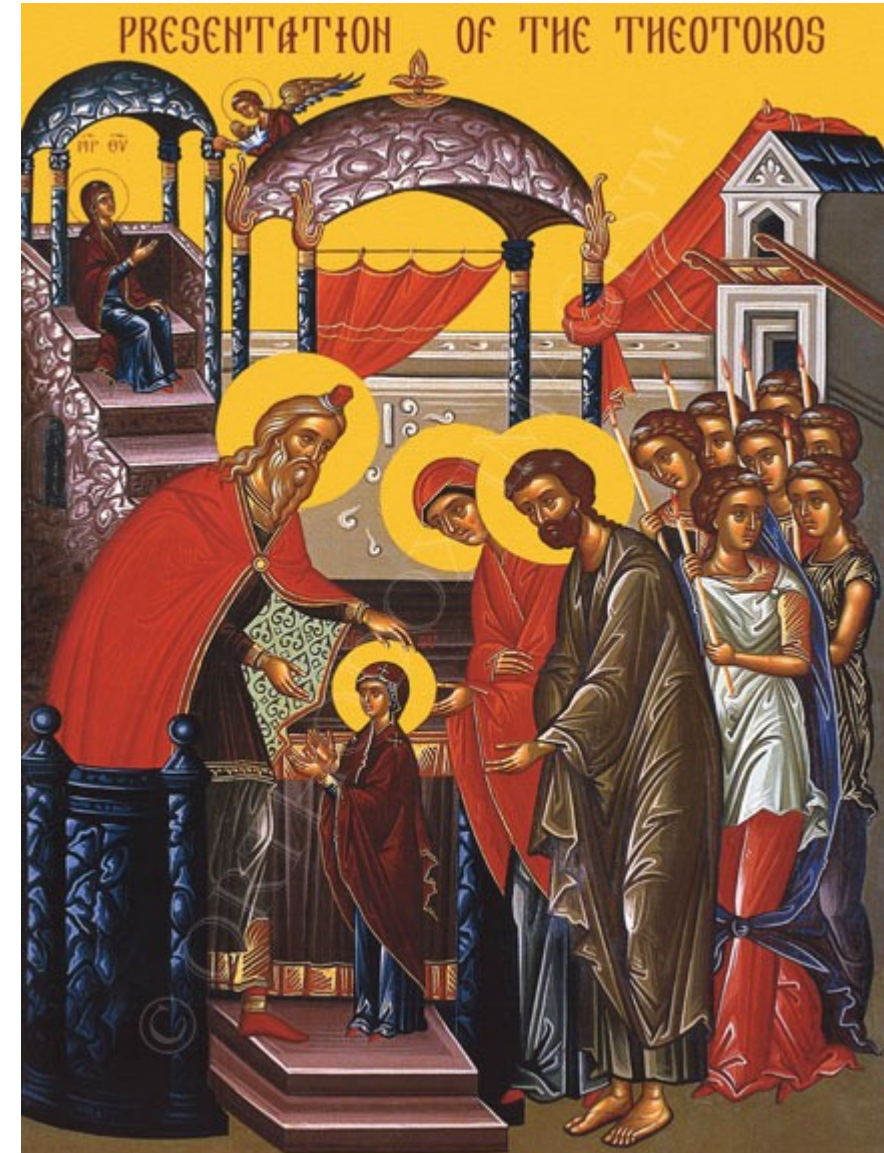
During her sojourn in the Temple, the holy child, through continuous prayer and vigilance, accomplished the purification of her heart, to make it a pure mirror to reflect the glory of God. She adorned herself as a bride in the splendid raiment of the virtues in readiness for the advent within herself of Christ the divine Bridegroom. She attained such perfection as to become the sum of all the holiness in the world and, when she had become like unto God by virtue, she drew God to make Himself unto man by His Incarnation.

The obscure prophecies become clear in her - the Sanctuary, the Tabernacle of the Word of God, the Ark of the New Covenant, the Vase containing the heavenly manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, the Table of the Law of Grace,. She is the Ladder joining heaven and earth which the Patriarch Jacob saw in a dream; she is the shut gate that Ezekiel spoke of by which God has come to visit mankind.

When the Mother of God entered the Holy of Holies, the time of preparation and testing of the Old Covenant came to an end, and today we keep the feast of the betrothal of God to human nature. Wherefore, the Church rejoices and exhorts all the friends of God for their part to enter into the temple of their heart, there to make ready for the coming of the Lord by silence and prayer...

By the intercession of our Most Holy Lady, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER THE HOLY CROSS NOVEMBER 22, 2020



The Presentation of the Theotokos into the Temple (Nov. 21)

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Divine Liturgy: Sunday 10:00 AM

Antiphon (Feast)

1: Great is the Lord and wholly to be praised in the city of our God, on His holy mountain

Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us.

2: Glorious things have been said of you, O City of God!

Be shafa'ati Walidatil Eelah, ya Mukhallisu, khallisna.

3: God is within her castles; renowned is He as a stronghold

Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us.

Entrance Hymn

Priest: Come let us worship and bow down before Christ.

People: O Son of God Who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You: Alleluia!

Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone 8, pg. 42)

You destroyed Death by Your cross. You opened paradise to the thief. You changed the weeping of the myrrh-bearers, and commanded Your apostles to proclaim that You, O Christ God, have risen, granting to the world great mercy.

Troparion of the Presentation of the Virgin (Tone 4)

Today is the prelude of the benevolence of God, and the announcement of the salvation of men: in the Temple of God the Virgin is seen openly, foretelling to all the coming of Christ. Wherefore let us cry to her with a loud voice: "Hail, O fulfillment of the Creator's Plan!"

Troparion of the Dormition (Tone 1, Pg 15)

In giving birth, you have preserved your virginity and in falling asleep, you did not forsake the world, O Mother of God. You have passed to life, being the Mother of Life. Through your intercessions, save our souls from death.

Kondakion Presentation of the Blessed Virgin (Tone 4)

The most pure Temple of our holy Savior, and the most precious bridal chamber, the Virgin, sacred treasure of glory of God, enters today in the Temple of the Lord, bringing with her the grace of the Most Holy Spirit. Wherefore the angels of God are singing: "This is the heavenly tabernacle!"

Our celebration of this feast focuses on Mary as the temple of the incarnate God, the one for whom the Jerusalem temple was only a prefiguration. After their entry with Christ into Jerusalem His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to the temple and the buildings in its compound. Jesus replied, "Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down'" (Mt 24:2). This feast celebrates the fulfillment of His prophecy. God's people will no longer reach heaven via Jerusalem; rather the heavens have been opened to us and God's temple, the Theotokos, is become for us the way to heaven through her childbearing.

"Hail, Full of Grace"

Perhaps the most popular hymn of this feast is the kontakion, *O katharotatos naos*, which summarizes in a few lines the theology we have been presenting. It reads: "The most pure Temple of the Savior, the most precious and bright bridal chamber – the Virgin, sacred treasury of the glory of God – enters today into the Temple of the Lord, bringing with her the grace of the Most Holy Spirit. Wherefore, the angels of God are singing: 'This is the heavenly Tabernacle!'" In this hymn two teachings are affirmed. Mary is proclaimed by the angels as "the heavenly tabernacle." The tabernacle, we know, was the portable holy place which the Hebrews brought with them in the desert until they reached the promised land. It was rendered into a more permanent form as the temple. Now Mary, not any building, is the holy place where God dwelled.

Secondly we are told that Mary entered the temple "bringing with her the grace of the Most Holy Spirit." People went to the temple to encounter God, to receive His blessings. Mary, instead, brings God's grace with her. She is proclaimed as "full of grace," even as a child, by the angels themselves. This feast is thus for the Eastern Churches what the Immaculate Conception is to the West: a celebration of the holiness of Mary, sanctified from her earliest days by the Most Holy Spirit who dwelt in her.

As we have said it was unthinkable that a child, or anyone for that matter, should enter the Holy of Holies. But it is Mary's rightful place as the woman full of grace who would contain within her innermost self the Uncontainable One. There she remains in the Holy Places of our churches: the Platytera between earth and heaven, the foremost worshipper of the Lord whom she bore.



DIVINE LITURGY INTENTIONS

Today Those infected with the coronavirus and those who care for them
The people of Beirut
+Those who have lost their lives to the coronavirus
+Those who lost their lives in the Beirut explosion

Upcoming Feast Day Liturgical Schedule

Fri 12/4, 6PM - Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St Barbara

Tue 12/8, 6PM - Vespers for the Maternity of St. Anne

NOTE: Evening feast day services will be at 6PM effective September 1 unless announced otherwise.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

For many years, Thanksgiving has been a day for giving thanks to God with family and friends. We gather together and share a meal, which throughout history has been a covenantal sign. This year, Thanksgiving will feel different. We can't gather in large groups; we have to forego many of our family Thanksgiving traditions. There is one thing that won't change: Thanking God for all of the blessings in our lives. Praising Him for His glory and majesty! Yes, life is a bit trying at the moment. We can't do everything we want, when we want. But, we make these sacrifices for the welfare of our brothers and sisters. Things like wearing masks and avoiding large gatherings are minor when compared with the well-being of our fellow men, women, and children! So, wear your mask! Don't gather in large groups! Keep your distance! Have virtual get-togethers!

Don't forget that God is with us. He is with those suffering with the virus. He is with those who care for them. He is with those who are working on the various vaccines so that we might return to a more normal mode of life. This Thanksgiving, take some time to bring to the front of your mind all of that God has done for you and then thank him! The pandemic has given us the chance to contemplate what is important to us. As we do that, let us resolve to not forget those things going forward.

I miss you all and you are in my prayers!

In the love of Christ,

Fr. Bryan



The Bishop's Appeal 2020 Building A Better Life On A Solid Foundation Through Faith & Family

At this time of year when we offer thanksgiving for all God's blessings, Our Lord speaks to us in the Gospel about storing up treasure in Heaven and about being rich in the things of God. Let us give back to the Lord in return for all the blessings He has bestowed upon us. Let us give thanks to God for the precious gift of our Melkite Church and pay a tribute of thanksgiving for the labor and sacrifice of our forebears in the faith who have gone before us. Offer your thanks to God by giving a generous gift to the Bishop's Appeal. Extra donation slips are available in the narthex.

The traditional Christmas Fast began **November 15**. In the Melkite usage, it begins **December 10**. We use this time to prepare ourselves for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. Like all of the fasts during the church year, we abstain from meat, meat products, fish, oil and wine. During this fast, fish is allowed on Saturdays, Sundays, and certain feasts, such as the Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple (Nov. 21). Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are tools to help us grow closer to Christ. A bodily fast without a spiritual one is just a diet. We are called to pray more, be more humble and repentant. We are also called to be more charitable.

Everyone is called to fast, but we must do so in accordance with our individual circumstances. If you have not fasted before, start slowly. Abstain from meat & meat products on Wednesdays and Fridays. You can then slowly expand your fasting. Fasting is an ascetical labor that takes practice and guidance. If you have any questions about fasting, please reach out to Fr. Bryan.

Last Week's Collection

Regular	\$ 955
Candles	\$ 16
Christmas Flowers	\$ 30
Miscellaneous	\$ 22
Total	\$ 1,023



IT'S PROBABLY SAFE TO SAY that most people would prefer to read a story than an academic treatise. Both forms might be conveying the same point, but a narrative is likely to be more compelling – and more memorable – than a dissertation.

The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, the Great Feast we celebrate today, rests on such a narrative. The story is found in *The Protoevangelion of James*, a second-century telling of the birth and infancy of the Theotokos. We know that in the first and second centuries AD a number of books were written about Christ and His Mother. Some were accepted by all the local Churches as presenting a true portrait of the Messiah. Others were rejected because the Christ they portrayed was not the one who had been preached by the apostles. In some He was a Gnostic philosopher, in other a magician. We call these “apocryphal gospels” and do not see them as the voice of the Holy Spirit to us. Still other books, *The Protoevangelion of James* among them, were revered by the Christians of their day but not considered canonical Scriptures because their content was not at the heart of the apostolic proclamation or the early Creeds. Their subject matter treated things like Jesus’ physical appearance or the early periods of Christ’s life not covered in the Gospels. They may be true but not central to our faith.

The Source of This Feast

The prayers and icon of this Feast focus on two elements of the Protoevangelion story. In the first, Mary at the age of three is presented to God in the temple at Jerusalem accompanied, as the text reads, “by the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled.” There “the priest received her, kissed her and blessed her.”

The second vignette is shown in the upper right hand corner of this icon. There Mary sits in the innermost sanctuary of the temple, the Holy of Holies, ministered to by an angel. According to Jewish Law, no one entered the Holy of Holies: “*only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance*” (Heb 9:8). It is unthinkable that a child would be not only allowed there but actually live there as the *Protoevangelion* avows.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are given a reason why no one was allowed into the Holy of Holies: “*The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning*” (Heb 9:9). By placing Mary in the Holy of Holies, the *Protoevangelion* is saying that the way into the Holy Place – the presence of God – now is disclosed. It is Christ, who would be incarnate in the womb of this same Mary the Theotokos. For this reason the story and its celebration have been embraced by the Tradition as affirmations of the Gospel.

Mary’s coming into the temple is portrayed as an “Entrance” on this feast in the Christian East rather than as a “Presentation” as in the West. This term puts us in mind of things like the “Great Entrance” at our Divine Liturgy or the Entrance Procession in the Western rites. Her coming is not the blessing of an insignificant child given in a “side chapel,” as it were, but a festive “prelude” or “overture” inaugurating the main event, the New Testament itself

Prokimenon

Reader: Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

People: Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

Verse: God is renowned in Judah; in Israel, great is His name

People: Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

Reader: Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them;

People: Let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

Epistle: Eph. 4:1-7

Alleluia Verses

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord; Let us sing joyfully to God our Savior!

Verse: Let us greet His presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to Him!

Gospel: Lk 12:16-22

Special Petitions for the Ecumenic Prayer (Inserted after the third petition)

- For all your people who have proven positive with the coronavirus, that they may be restored to full health and offer you their praise and thanksgiving, we pray to you, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For all those who have died as a result of the coronavirus that they may be granted rest with the Saints and the mercy of God in the Heavenly Kingdom, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For doctors, nurses, and all in health care, risking their lives to minister to those afflicted with the coronavirus, that they remain safe, and in good health as they serve others, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For all your people in Lebanon who were hurt during the disastrous explosion, that they may be restored to full health, and for those who died that they may be granted rest among the Saints, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For peace throughout the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.

Hirmos of the Feast (Tone 4)

The angels were stunned as they saw the Virgin coming in: “How has she entered in glory into the Holy of Holies!” O Mother of God, you are the living Ark of God: no profane hand may touch you. But the lips of the faithful will never cease to sing your praise, repeating with joy the angel’s words: “O pure Virgin, you are indeed raised above all creatures!”